

Godzilla: A HTTYD Fanfic

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Summary: A retelling of Godzilla (2014) but with some HTTYD characters that's all I gotta say

## 1. Prologue

In 1999, the Janjira nuclear plant was mysteriously destroyed with most hands lost including supervisor Stoick's colleague and wife, Valka. Years later, Stoick's son, Hiccup, a US Navy ordnance disposal officer, must go to Japan to help his estranged father who obsessively searches for the truth of the incident. In doing so, father and son discover the disaster's secret cause on the wreck's very grounds. This enables them to witness the reawakening of a terrible threat to all of Humanity, which is made all the worse with a second secret revival elsewhere. Against this cataclysm, the only hope for the world may be Godzilla, but the challenge for the King of the Monsters will be great even as Humanity struggles to understand the destructive ally they have.

## 2. Chapter 1

Dr. Alvin Hamil gazed out the side door of the helicopter as it soared over a lush green landscape. A distinguished-looking man in his early forties, with receding black hair and a mustache and beard, Alvin enjoyed the view-until he spied his destination.

The strip mine cut like a gash through the verdant wilderness. Alvin winced at the damage done to the environment. The older he got, the more he thought that Nature was sometimes best left to its own devices.

His eyes narrowed as he spied what appeared to be a caved-in section of the mine. He eyed the collapsed mine with a mixture of excitement and trepidation. The early reports had hinted at something truly remarkable, well worth this exhausting journey. Alvin couldn't wait

to see for himself.

The chopper touched down on a flattened stretch of mountaintop, not far from the cave-in.

Finally, Alvin thought. He unbuckled his seatbelt and climbed stiffly out of the copter, followed by his colleague, Dr. Heather Whitman. An attractive Englishwoman in her twenties. She had been at Alvin's right hand for many years now. Her practical attire was rumpled from the trip.

Alvin took a moment to get his bearings. It felt good to set foot on solid ground and stretch his legs again.

"Dr. Hamil!"

A stocky, middle-aged American emerged from the chaos surrounding the mine. Alvin recognized the man as Gobber Ferguson, one of the men in charge of the mining company. He and Alvin had been in touch earlier.

"Thank God you're here!" Gobber shouted over the white of the rotors. He joined Alvin and his team. "it's just a mess, I'm warning you. Just a total mess. They picked up a radiation pocket out here last month." Gobber said, getting down to business. He sounded anxious for whatever advice and assistance the scientists might be able to offer.

"And got all excited thinking they had a radiation deposit. They started stacking up the heavy machinery and..." As he spoke, he guided them down a slope toward a nearby ridge. Alvin stepped carefully over the rough, uneven terrain.

"The floor of the valley collapsed into the cavern below," Gobber continued. "Just dropped away. Best guess right now is about forty miners went down with it."

He stepped aside to let Alvin and the others see for themselves. The tram found themselves on a rocky ledge, looking out over the valley below—or what was left of it.

Fully suited up, the team made their way into the chasm, steadying themselves on guide ropes that had been set up for the rescue operations. Their flashlights did little to dispel the darkness as they entered a cavern descending steeply into the earth.

While Alvin monitored the radiation levels, Heather documented the expedition with her digital camera.

A work crew from the mine, drafted into service by Gobber, set up globe lights around the spacious interior of the cavern. Alvin and Heather both gasped out loud as the first of the lights flared to life, giving them a better look at the scene in whole. Thick bands of a porous, calcite-like material ribbed the grotto.

"The rocks, right?" Gobber said, as though anticipating the scientists' reaction. "I've been digging holes for thirty years, but I never seen anything like it"

Alvin's eyes widened as he gasped what he was seeing

"No," he said, his voice hushed in awe. "Not geological. Biological." He raised his flashlight, concentrating it's beam on the huge shield-shaped calcite formation that made up the ceiling of the grotto. At least twenty meters in length, it's contours were clearly recognizable if you knew what you were looking for. "The ceiling...it's bone. It's the sternum. We're inside a ribcage"

Before Gobber could process that, the rest of the globe lights popped, flooding the vast cavern with cold white light. Alvin turned about, taking in the entire scene. Gigantic rib bones, curving upwards like the buttresses of medieval cathedral. Alvin realized that he was literally standing on the long-buried backbone of some incredibly gargantuan lifeform,

Heather stepped away from Gobber, before the speechless foreman could start pelting them with questions. Like Alvin, she rotated slowly to absorb the full magnitude of what they had discovered. Her eyes were wide behind the visor of her gas mask. She drew closer to Alvin.

"Is it Him?" she asked quietly. "Is it possible?"

Alvin shook his head. "This is far older"

"Guys!" a voice called out from deep within the cavern. It belonged to Eret, a young graduate student who had recently joined Alvin's team. "You gotta see this!"

Alvin and the others hurried toward him. They found Eret standing under a beam of natural daylight shining down from above.

"That one," Eret pointed out. "The one that's broken it's almost as though something came out of it..."

Indeed, one of the enormous sacs appeared to have shattered from the inside.

"Wait," Eret said. "Did something actually come out of there?"

Alvin retained from he headed toward the sunlight, joining Eret in a wide circle of warm golden light. Tilting his head back, he peered upward.

High above his head, a ragged hole in the ceiling opened up onto the outside world—almost as though something had burst outward from the depth of the cavern, leaving the ruptured sac behind

### 3. Chapter 2

The alarm clock jolted Hiccup Haddock from sleep. One minute he'd been dreaming about riding a dragon through outer space, the next he found himself back in his bedroom in suburban Japan. Dawn streamed through the window curtains. Only nine years old, the boy smacked the snooze button on the clock and buried his face back into his pillow. Maybe he could get in a few more moments of sleep before his mom dragged him out of bed.

Then he remembered what day it is.

His eyes lit up and a mischievous smile spread across his face. He slid out of bed and tiptoed across the floor. There was a reason he had set the alarm to wake him up an hour early. He had a lot to accomplish before his dad woke up.

But as he snuck out into the hall, still in his pajamas, he was dismayed to hear Stoick Haddock's voice coming from his office at the end of the corridor. Creeping closer, Hiccup heard his dad pacing back and forth across the work-filled office, talking urgently on the phone:

"I'm asking Takashi Takashi I'm asking for the meeting because I don't know what's going on. If I could explain it, I'd write a memo"

Shaking his head, Stoick ran a hand through his unruly reddish-brown hair. He threw an exasperated look at Hiccup's mom, Valka, who hovered in the doorway to the office, listening intently to her husband's side of the conversation. Hiccup didn't understand what the problem was, but he figured it had something to do with his parents' work at the nuclear power plant. The family had relocated from San Francisco a few years ago so that they could both get good jobs at the plant.

"Because Hayato said it had to come from you" Stoick said impatiently.

His mom heard Hiccup shuffling behind her. She turned away from the office to spot him in the hallway. He crept up beside her, distraught over this unexpected turn of events.

"He's awake?" he whispered

Her face transformed in an instant; going from concerned professional to sympathetic mom right away. She knelt down to look Hiccup in the eye. She mussed his light brown hair.

"I know!" she whispered back. "He got up early"

Hiccup's heart sank. Of all mornings for there to be a problem at the plant. "What're we gonna do?"

"Get dressed," she instructed him, flashing a conspiratorial smile. "I'll figure it out"

"Later, Dad!"

>Hiccup sprinted past the family car on his way to the bus stop. Seated behind the wheel, Stoick waved distractedly at the boy, while wrapping up his call.<p>

"Good. Finally?" he said in Japanese. "Thank you"

Valka slid into the passenger seat beside him. She clipped a "Janjira Power" ID badge to the lapel of her jacket and handed a matching badge to Stoick

"He made you a sign, you know"

A sign? A pang of guilt stabbed Stoick as he realized what she meant,

and that he had been utterly oblivious to whatever she and Hiccup had cooked up for his birthday. Contrite, he put down his phone and looked over at his wife. He'd had no idea...

"He worked so hard," she said "I think what I'm gonna do, I'm gonna come home early. I'll take the car and pick him up and we can get a proper cake"

Stoick was grateful that she was on top of thisâ€”and letting him off so easily. "I'm gonna practice being surprised all day. I promise"

A local engineer, Sacho Maki, hurried up to Stoick with an anxious expression on his face. He nervously thrust a file of reports at Stoick. Stoick flipped through the folder, which contained some seismographic readings he had never seen before.

"Whoa." He froze in his tracks, caught off-guard by the data. "What is that?"

"Yes," Maki confirmed. "Seismic anomaly"

"This is from when?" Stoick asked urgently

"Now," Maki said. "This is now"

Stoick blinked, not quite grasping the truth. When Maki said "now" did he really mean...?

"This graph is minutes, not days," Maki explained, spelling it out. "This is now"

Valka headed straight for the  
>sub-level corridors beneath the primary reactor building pausing briefly before a large open doorway,<p>

She had rounded up a four-person team to assist her in the inspection. They quickly climbed into full-body radiation suits, as required by the Level 5 safety protocols.

"Alright," she said, leading the way. "Let's make this quick"

A second later, a sudden rumble shook the entire building. The tremor hit even harder down on Level 5. Valka's team froze in surprise. One of her team members, Toyoaki Yamato, looked at her in alarm. "What was that?"

The overhead lights flickered momentarily, but then the subterranean rumbling stopped. Valka held her breath for a moment, waiting to see if the tremor had truly subsided, before taking charge again. She tried her best to keep her voice steady.

"Just a little farther," she stated. "Let's check the cask and get out of here"

The other workers nodded and quickened their pace. Nobody wanted to linger in the containment area longer than possible. Including Valka.

Stoick could feel the tension in the plant's control room the minute he arrived.

Stoick spotted the men in charge, Haruo Takashi and Ren Hayato, huddled over a bank of monitors. All eyes turned toward Stoick. He can tell right away that there was more bad news coming.

"What the hell's going on?!" he demanded

Takashi turned to face him. "Maybe not such a good time for a meeting," he suggested

"Agreed," Stoick said, pushing the seismic graphs on Takashi, "Have you seen this?"

Takashi nodded toward the bank of monitors he had been glued to before. Hayato stepped aside so that Stoick could see for himself. Stoick immediately recognized the distinctive waveform snaking and pulsing across the monitors. It was the same pattern that he had been staring at for days

"Do we have a source?" he asked crisply. "Where's the epicenter"

"We keep trying...nothing..."

Stoick shook his head. "It's got to be centered somewhere"

Hayato spoke up. "No one else is reporting. We've contacted every other plant in the Kanto region, Tokai, Fujiyama...they're unaffected"

Stoick wasn't sure if that was good news or bad. "Are we at full function?"

Takashi nodded. "Perhaps we should be drawing down. To be safe"

"Is that my call?" Stoick asked

"Right now, maybe yes," Hayato conceded. "We're trying to reach Mr. Mori, but he's not answering"

Stoick wasn't inclined to wait on the owner of the company. This was a safety issue.

As though to drive point home, another tremor rattled the building. This one was felt even harder and sharper than before. Stoick felt the weight of dozens of eyes upon him. He made up his mind.

"Take us off-line," he said

Takashi balked. A shutdown could cost millionsâ€"and possibly their jobs. "Stoick..."

"Do it. Wind it down." He issued the order in Japanese. "Shut down the reactors."

There was a brief moment of hesitation before the room erupted into a quick frenzy of activity. Stoick needed to know that Valka was okay.

Before he could get a hold of her, Stoick glanced in alarm at the monitors, where the pulse pattern was spiking into a new shape. The

walls shook.

Even worse, all the monitors and other electronics lost power for a second, briefly killing the lights, before they popped back on again.

"No status!" Takashi blurted. "Everything's rebooting"

"Calm," Stoick insisted, trying to maintain order. "No yelling"

Takashi got the message, settling down.

"All personal not needed for SLCS procedure should begin to evacuate the plant," Stoick announced. "You know the drill." He waited long enough to see his order being carried out before raising the walkie-talkie to his lips. "Valka? Val, can you hear me? You need to get back up here!"

At first there was no response, as he urgently spun through the channels, but then he heard his wife's voice over the receiver, broken up by bursts of static:

"â€"ear me... anyone co... this is... report... damage to tâ€" "

#### 4. Chapter 3

The sub-level monitoring station was practically useless. Every screen was either flickering or dead, making it practically impossible to get reliable readings on the reactor core and cooling systems. Valka kept one eye on her team, who were trying unsuccessfully to bring the equipment back on-line, as she worked the walkie-talkie.

"It's shaking hard down here, Stoick. Do you copy?"

Yamato stepped away from an uncooperative screen. "We've lost the monitors!" he reported.

"Sensors are down," another technician confirmed.

The team turned toward Valka, waiting for her to make the call. She hesitated, knowing how much Stoick was counting on her to get him the data he needed, but it looked like that wasn't going to happen.

"We're turning back," she declared. "Let's go!"

Yet another tremor shook the control room, nearly throwing Stoick off-balance. Overhead light fixtures swayed violently even as the fluorescent bulbs went dead. The tremor subsided and the lights blinked back on.

"Stoick, are you there?" Valka's voice broke through the static. "We're heading back through the containment sealâ€" "

He clutched the walkie-talkie to his ear. Hurry, he thought. Please hurry!

Valka and the others raced back the way they'd come, moving as fast as they could in the heavy radiation suits. She prayed that was fast enough.

"You need to get out of there," Stoick urged via the walkie-talkie. "If there's a reactor breach, you won't last five minutes, suits or no suits." She could hear the fear in his voice even through the static. "Do you hear me?"

"I hear you," she responded, breathing hard. "We're coming!"

A sonic pulse cut her off, thrumming louder than before. The floor quaked beneath her feet, causing her to miss a step. She threw out a hand to brace herself against a wall, and could feel the vibration even through insulated gloves. The lights flickered and

A massive jolt rocked the building to its foundations, as though it had been struck by a titanic sledge hammer. In the control room, Stoick and the others were thrown to the floor. Sprawled on the floor, Stoick rode out the tremor, keeping his face covered. Not until the shaking stopped did he cautiously lift his head and look around. He painfully pulled himself off the floor. His nerves were jangled, and he was bruised from the fall, but he was relieved to see that the control room was more or less intact. His eyes sought out the master control monitors, which, miraculously, were still running. Takashi and the others began to clamber to their feet as well. Nobody seemed seriously injured, at least not here in the control room.

But what about Valka and her team?

He peered up at a video monitor. Closed-circuit TV footage showed a crew in full radiation suits dashing through the reactor unit's sub-levels. He pointed anxiously at the screen.

"Valka and her crew," he exclaimed. "They're in the containment area!"

Takashi looked aghast. "Why?"

Stoick didn't have time to explain. "Oh shit," he muttered. What had that last shock had done to the reactor? He dashed for the exit, shouting back over his shoulder at Takashi. "Put the safety doors on manual override!"

"I can't do that!" he protested

Stoick didn't want to hear it. He shouted back from the doorway.

"PUT THE DOORS ON MANUAL!"

Valka and the others raced down a concrete corridor, which felt twice as long as she remembered. A stairway, leading to an upper level, finally appeared before them.

Thank God, she thought. Maybe we can still get out of here

Another jolt nearly threw her off her feet. Yamato stumbled, but she grabbed onto him and kept him from falling. The cumbersome radiation



suits made every movement clumsier than it ought to be, and were unbearably hot as well; she was half-tempted to shuck the suit, but that would be insane. For all she knew, there could be a leak at any minute.

The team squeezed into the cramped, dimly lit stairwell. They were all panting now, weighed down by the heavy suits and breathing gear. Valka's muscles ached and her legs felt like they were made of lead, but adrenalin and panic kept her and the others climbing for their lives.

If they could just make it past the containment threshold...

An emergency stairwell led from the control room to the primary reactor unit. Stoick rushed down, taking the steps two or three at a time. His heart pounded in his chest, going a mile a minute, while he prayed that Valka was heading toward him from the opposite direction. He wasn't sure how much longer he could count on Takashi to keep the containment doors open.

Reaching Level 5 in record time, he burst out of the stairwell and skidded to a stop right before the entrance to the containment area. Stoick peered down the long corridor beyond, hoping desperately to see Valka and the others running toward him, but the hallway was eerily silent and empty, as though it had been already been evacuated. He was tempted to run into the corridor to find Valka, but there was no time to suit up and somebody had to stand by to trigger the manual controls, just in case the worst-case scenario played out.

C'mon, Val, he thought. Where the hell are you?

A closed-circuit video camera was mounted in a corner where the walls met the ceiling. Stoick hoped to God that Takashi was still watching this. He shouted up at the camera, "Takashi! Tell me this door is on manual!"

The other man's voice emerged from the comm system.  
>"Manual, yes, but Stoickâ€"we're starting to breach, you understand me?"<p>

He understood alright. This was the nightmare that every nuclear engineer dreaded, the one that kept them up all nights. He feared there was nothing he could do to save one or all of the reactors. But maybe he could still save his wife.

"I'm right here," he told Takashi, as forcefully as he could. "As soon as they're through I'll seal it!"

He hoped that would be enough to Takashi's finger off the panic button, but he wouldn't blame the other man for playing it safe.

"Valka?" he said into the walkie-talkie. "Can you hear me? I'm here honey. I'm at the door!"

She held on tightly to the walkie-talkie as she and the others sprinted breathlessly down yet another seemingly endless corridor. Steel-toed rubber boots pounded against the hard concrete floors. The crew had made it up the stairs, but they still had a ways to go

before they were beyond the containment area. Stoick's voice, coming over the walkie-talkie, urged her on, even though his words were fragmented by harsh blasts of static:  
>"â€"ereâ€"for youâ€"checkpoinâ€"aitingâ€" "<br>-

Emergency klaxons started blaring behind them like angry foghorns. Flashing red annunciator lights turned the sterile white corridors incarnadine. Valka glanced back behind her, as did the rest of her team. Panic gripped her heart.

Stoick stared anxiously past the threshold, frozen in fear. He listened numbly to Takashi's fractured voice over the intercom. Static interference mangled the transmission, rendering it barely comprehensible:  
>"Haddockâ€"weâ€"ahâ€"eachâ€" "<p>

"What?" Stoick asked, straining to make out what was being said. "Say again?"

"Catastrophic radiation breach!"

Stoick had thought he couldn't be any more scared, but this nightmare just kept getting worse and worse. Utter horror transfixed him. This couldn't be happening...

"Seal the corridor," Takashi pleaded, "or the whole city will be exposed!"

"Five seconds...four seconds..."

Takashi counted down over the intercom as Stoick stood like a statue right outside the containment area, staring blankly at the empty corridor beyond.

"Stoick," Takashi said, reaching at the end of his countdown. "You have to shut it down...now"

Looking away from the entrance, Stoick starred at the manual control button on the wall. He tried to step toward it, but his feet didn't want to move. He forced himself to take one step toward the button, two, three... until the button was within reach. He raised his hand, clenched his fist.

God forgive me, he thought

Static squawked from the walkie-talkie. Fragmented bursts of his wife's voice came over the speaker:

>"â€"Stoickâ€"earâ€"anâ€" "<p>

His heart surged in his chest. He clutched the walkie-talkie hard enough to turn his knuckles white. Desperation filled his voice.

"Valka? Valka?"

Perversely, the static abated long enough for him to hear her clearly at last, perhaps for the last time.

"Stoick. It's too late! We're not gonna make it!"

Her words hit him harder than any earthquake, shattering his world.

"No, no!" he shouted into the walkie-talkie. "Don't you say that! Don't you stop!"

"You have to do it!" The signal began to break up again, pops and crackles threatening to consume her final words. "You have to live! For Hiccup!"

The radio sputtered and died. He smacked it furiously, trying to get her back.

"VALKA!"

Klaxons blared as a swirling cloud of discharged vapor came gusting around a bend at the far end of the corridor. Red lights flashed in alarm. The radioactive gases rushed toward Stoick...and the boundary

"You have to seal it!" Takashi shouted frantically over the intercom. "STOICK!"

Stoick thought of the unsuspecting city outside the plant. Hiccup would be at school now, maybe playing at recess...along with dozens of other kids. And thousands of other men, women, and children were going about their business, unaware of the hell that had been unleashed from the damaged reactor, the hell he was trapped in now.

Screaming in rage, he drew back his arm and pounded his fist into the emergency control button. A transparent barrier instantly slammed down like the blade of a guillotine, sealing off the contaminated corridor. The advancing red lights halted right on the other side of the barrier. The screaming sirens faded away, echoing into silence.

Dear god, Stoick thought. What have I done?

He felt destroyed by what he had just done. The finality of shutting the barrier on his wife. The walkie-talkie slipped from his fingers, crashing unnoticed onto the floor. Unable to stand, he slid limply to the ground, his back against the thick plexiglass barrier. He buried his face in his hands.

"Stoick?" Takashi said. "The barrier will only hold so long. We have to close the lead shield, too"

Stoick knew he was right, but he couldn't cope with that right now. A dull pounding reached his ears, coming from the barrier behind him. Dread gripped his heart as he realized what the pounding meant.

Oh, God, he thought. I'm not sure I can stand this...

Lifting his face from his hands, he forced himself to turn slowly toward the barrier and the ghastly sight waiting for him on the other side of the transparent wall.

Valka merely slumped in exhaustion on the other side of the wall. His

eyes burned with tears that had yet to spill in his face.

"Stoick," Takashi interrupted. "I'm closing the shield"

No, Stoick thought. Not yet!

He looked around frantically for the fallen walkie-talkie and snatched it from the floor. Tears began to fall as he held it to his lips.

"Valka? Can you hear me?"

She shook her head sadly, holding his gaze with her eyes.

"I'm sorry," he sobbed

She placed her palm against the glass. He reached out to place his own hand over hers, only to hear a juzzer buzzer inform him that their time was up.

The second barrier engaged. Stoick yanked his hand back just in time. For a few final moments, their eyes met in silent communication. Her lips moved, as though she was trying to comfort him, or perhaps just say goodbye, but he would never know what her last words were.

The doors slammed shut, cutting her off from view...forever.

Goodbye, Stoick thought. May God forgive me

A violent tremor jolted him from his grief. The building quaked all around him. Dust and fervid rained down from the ceiling. The floor bucked beneath him.

"The entire plant is collapsing!" Takashi shouted from the comm. "We have to get out...NOW!"

Hiccup found it hard to communicate on Miss Okada's language lesson. He couldn't wait for the day to be over that his dad could finally see the surprise he and his mom prepared for him.

Emergency sirens started wailing outside, distracting Hiccup from his sugary daydreams.

Both teacher and students stopped what they were doing and turned their heads toward the window. Hiccup instantly thought of his parentsâ€”and how stressed his dad had been that morning.

He rushed to the window, even as Miss Okada tried to herd the rest of the class out the door. His teacher called to him, but Hiccup barely registered her anxious voice. Unable to look away, he stared out the window as...

The entire plant collapsed before his eyes. With a deafening roar, all three containment buildings dropped out of sight, as though suddenly swallowed up by the earth. Children, and even a few teachers, screamed as, in a matter of minutes, the looming nuclear power plant ceased to exist.

Mom! Hiccup thought, Dad!

The roar of the disaster consumed his entire world

## 5. Chapter 4

### FIFTEEN YEARS LATER

A high-pitched hydraulic whine roused Lieutenant Hiccup Haddock from an uneasy slumber. A silver of light hit his tired green eyes, causing him to blink and look away. The twenty-five year old Navy officer sat in the cramped-but-spacious hold of a C-17 Globemaster transport plane, surrounded by dozens of troops from other branches of the armed services, all returning from recent tours of duty in Afghanistan. Hiccup knew he ought to be more excited about finally touching down back home, but, to be honest, he was mostly worn-out, jet-legged, and even a bit apprehensive.

"Family waiting for you?" Captain Spitelout asked, eyeing Hiccup. A career soldier in his mid-forties.

Hiccup shrugged. "Hope so"

Spitelout nodded. "How long you been away?"

"Fourteen months."

"Take it slow," Spitelout advised, gathering up his kit. "It's the one thing they don't train you for"

Outside the hangar at Travis Air Force Base, a mob a eager friends and families waited impatiently behind a cordon for the first glimpse of their loved ones. Cheers and applause hailed the first apperance of the troops, followed by tears and squeals of delight as individuals spotted their respective loved ones. Lost in a sea of jubilant strangers, Hiccup looked around anxiously, searching for a familiar face. At first all he saw was other people's reunions, but them:

>"Hello, stranger"<p>

Astrid emerged from the chaotic mob scene, her bright blond hair and blue eyes instantly rendering everyone else insignificant, aside from the mop-headed four-year-old boy clutched in her arms. A rush of emotion overcame Hiccup at the sight of his wife and son, who had only been flickering images on a computer screen for over a year now. They jostled their way through the crowd toward each other. Beaming and beautiful, Astrid put Sam down on the pavement in front of his father. Hiccup half expected the boy to come charging toward him, but instead Sam looked oddly tentative. He hung back shyly, retreating behind his mother, while Hiccup stood by helplessly, uncertain what to do.

Astrid broke the awkward silence. "Lots of discussion about who gets the first hug." she explained.

"Where'd you come out on that?" Hiccup asked

Astrid bent to confer with Sam. "You change your mind, honey?"

Sam stared at Hiccup wordlessly. Hiccup knelt down before him,

approaching him as delicately as he would an unexploded bomb.

"I've been carrying around that last hug you gave me for a long time," Hiccup said gently, even as Sam continued to gaze at him as though he didn't quite recognize the uniformed stranger before him.

"I could sure use a refill."

The boy came out from behind Astrid, but still appeared a little shy. Astrid placed a comforting hand on Sam's shoulder, while casting an apologetic look at Hiccup.

"Let's do this," she suggested. "Why don't I go first and check it out and make sure Daddy still knows what he's doing?"

She came forward and, for the time being, all Hiccup's fears and worries evaporated as she was there in his arms once more, holding him close, kissing him passionately, and he felt keenly just how much he had missed her during his long months abroad. Sam was squeezed in between them, hesitantly joining in the celebration. The three of them clung to each other, wrapped up tight in the moment. For the first time since the plane touched down, Hiccup truly felt like he was home.

At least for now.

"Welcome Home, Daddy!" read the homemade banner taped to the dining room wall.

The sun had fallen by the time they got back to their modest home in San Francisco. Hiccup was relieved to see that the house looked much as he remembered. Dinner was cartons of ice cream, including Hiccup's favorite: Rocky Road. Across the table, Sam dug enthusiastically into a big carton of chocolate-chip mint.

"Sam, you better enjoy this," his mother said. "You're not getting ice cream for dinner every night."

"We aren't?" Hiccup said through a mouthful of Rocky Road, provoking giggles from Sam. "Why not?"

Astrid rolled her eyes. "Sam, how do you have a ten-year-old for a father? How is that mathematically possible?"

After ice cream, it was time to put Sam to bed. Although Astrid had been had been needed to help Sam into his pajamas, Hiccup had insisted on tucking his son into bed himself.

"See this one here?" He plucked a green plastic soldier from his bed-stash-battleground. "That's a lot like Daddy in his uniform, but mine's way cooler. We need to go to the toy store, find you a Navy man. How 'bout that?"

Sam nodded happily, grinning up at Hiccup, as his dad tucked him in.

"Alright, big man," he said, mussing the boy's hair. "Hit the shack"

He got up go leave. A worried look came over the little boy's face.

"Dad? You'll be here tomorrow, too, right?"

Hiccup winced at the anxiety in his son's voice.

"Yeah, buddy. I told you. The next two weeks are all yours." He reluctantly retreated toward the hall, where Astrid was waiting.

"Now get some shut-eye, okay? I'll still be here in the morning."

"You promise?"

Hiccup leaned in and gave Sam a gentle peck on the forehead.

"You bet," he promised

"â€"so by this point, he's literally buck naked with his jock strap on his forehead, a banana in his teeth, hooting like a monkeyâ€"and that's when our C.O. steps inâ€"and I swear to God, looks him right in the eye, not skipping a best, goes: 'At ease, Lieutenant.'"

Astrid doubled over, giggling hysterically, as Hiccup acted out the anecdote for her entertainment. They had the lights on dim on the kitchen and a half-empty bottle of wine rested on the table between them. She struggled to catch her breath, laughing so hard tears leaked from her eyes. Hiccup cracked up, too.

He came around the table and pulled her close.

"I missed your laugh," he said, relishing the feel of her against him. "My last roommate honked like a mule"

She melted into him. The familiar scent of her hair stirred his memories.

"I missed you, too," she said.

He drew her toward him. Their lips met as they surrendered to a mutual hunger that had not been satisfied for far too long. The kiss deepened, growing in heat, while they pressed against each other with ever-greater urgency, their hands exploring the tantalizing contours beneath their clothing. Locked in each other's arms, they began to ease toward the bedroom.

The phone rang.

"Don't," he said. "Not now."

Astrid disengaged from the embrace, pulling away, but he held on to her waist. Her face flushed.

"It could be work"

She was a nurse at San Francisco General Hostpial. It was one of the things he loved about her, even when their respective duties pulled

than apart. He clung to her playfully, nuzzling her neck, even as she leaned over to answer the phone.

"Hello?" she said into the receiver, fighting back giggles.

"Tell 'em you're busy," he whispered seductively into her ear. "Tell 'em your husband is unbuttoning your shirt as you speak!"

She wriggled deliciously and made a very half-hearted effort to away away his wandering hands while he nibbled on her ear. She turned her moist, enticing lips away from the phone.

"Hiccup, stop it!" "come on!"

The muffle voice spoke. All at once, her frolicsome manner evaporated. Her expression darkened and Hiccup knew at once that playtime was over.

"No, this is Mrs. Haddock," she replied to the unknown caller. "Yes, he's my husband. Hold on a moment"

She covered the phone and turned slowly toward Hiccup, who braced himself in anticipation.

"What? he asked.

"It's the consulate," she said tersely. "Stoick...he's been arrested in Japan."

Hiccup rummaged unhappily through bedroom dresser, searching for a clean pair of socks. He couldn't believe he was doing this. He hadn't even unpacked yet and here he was packing to leave again. He pulled open another drawer unable to find he was looking for.

"Why was he trespassing in the quarantine zone?" Astrid leaned against the wall, watching him pack. She nodded at the dresser. "No, the other drawer"

"Why do you think?" Hiccup said bitterly. "Lone crusader for the truth, all his crackpot theories."

"Your father's a good man. He just needs help. He lost everything that day."

"So did I. But I got over it."

"I can see that," she said wryly

Hiccup paused in his search, realizing how he must sound. A photo of Astrid and Sam, residing atop the dresser, reminded him not to take this out on her, and how much this whole situation sucked.

"We've worked so hard for everything we have, Astrid. I'm afraid he'll ruin it. Every time I let him close, he tries to drag me back. I can't live in the past. I can't put our family through that."

"He is your family, Hiccup." She came toward him, smiling. "You'll be back in a few days. It's not the end of the world."

He pulled her close and they kissed, doing their best to make every



moment count.

Just a few days, he thought. That's all

## 6. Chapter 5

It was late afternoon by the time he found himself sitting in the austere waiting area of a Tokyo police station. Hiccup tried flipping through some old magazines, only to discover that his Japanese wasn't what it used to be, despite the long-ago efforts of Miss Okada.

"Been a while," Stoick Haddock said.

Hiccup looked up to see his father standing before him, unkempt and dishelved from a night behind bars.

>Caught up in someone else's family drama, Hiccup hadn't even noticed his dad being led in. Father and son stared at each other awkwardly, both of them searching for a place to begin. It had been a long time since they had known how to talk to each other. Unable to find the right words, Hiccup just held out his hand to shake. It was the best he could do.<p>

It was dusk and neon lights filtered in from outside as Hiccup and his father entered the apartment. Hiccup glanced around dubiously. This dump was a far cry from the cozy suburban home he had once shared with his parentsâ€”in what was now a radioactive ghost town.

"I'm sorry you had to come all this way, Hiccup," his dad said.

Stoick stepped over tottering stacks of books, magazines, and newspapers piled high on the floor. Stoick avoided Hiccup's eyes.

"Couldn't you have just given them a credit card?"

The awkwardness between them had not gone away during the short drive here. Stoick flipped on a light, igniting a naked bulb hanging from the ceiling, and Hiccup got a better look at what his father's life had become.

The apartment was more than just a mess. It was a lunatic's hoard of papers, maps, books, notes, photos, Post-its, and graphs occupying every available surface, including the walls. Hiccup wasn't sure what his father was now.

"PhDs don't make much teaching English as a second language," Stoick offered by way of explanation for his low-rent accommodation. He waited in vain for Hiccup to say something, then continued.

"How's the bomb business? That must be a growth area these days."

Hiccup was irked by his dad 's remark.

"It's called explosive ordinance disposal. And my job isn't dropping bombs. It's stopping them."

His gaze was still riveted by the insane accumulation of information pinned and taped on the walls. Looking closer, he spied decades-old news clippings about the meltdown, maps of the quarantine zone, and what appeared to be clandestine spy-photos of tall razor-wire fences and armed sentries on patrol. Hiccup frowned. He had a pretty good idea who had taken those amateur photos.

"How's Astrid doing?" Stoick asked, in a transparent attempt to divert Hiccup's attention from the walls. "Sam must be, what, two already?"

"Four actually."

Hiccup didn't feel like talking about Sam. He made his way across the clutter to a second-hand desk that was practically buried beneath a surplus of scientific tomes. Bookmarks flagged key sections. Notes had been scribbled in the margins.

"I thought you were over this stuff."

He sorted through the books, looking over the titles and chapter headings. He picked one after another up, trying to make sense of it all. "Echolocation. Parasitic Communication Patterns." Stoick took the book from Hiccup.

"Homework," he said with forced casualness. "I'm studying Biocoustics. My new thing."

As though that explains everything, Hiccup thought, losing patience. He was too tired and fed up to beat around the bush any longer. He turned away from the desk to confront his father.

"Dad, what the hell were you doing?"

"Ah, that trespassing stuff is nonsense, Hiccup." Stoick waved it away with a dismissive gesture. "I was just trying to get to the old houseâ€"

"It's a quarantine zone!"

"Exactly!" Stoick's casual pose fell away, revealing what was really driving him. "That's exactly itâ€"there's something happening in there, Hiccup. I've seen pictures. They didn't quarantine that place because it's dangerous. They've got something going on in there. The new readings are exactly like they were on that day, and if I can't get back in before it's too lateâ€"

"DAD!"

Hiccup cut him off, unable to hear anymore. His dad had been spewing this same wild conspiracy stuff for longer than Hiccup wanted to remember. A crestfallen look came over Stoick's face as he realized, that his own son thought that he was bat-shit crazy.

"You know your mom's still out there," he said weakly, his voice barely a whisper. "For me, she'll always be there. They evacuated us so quickly I don't even have a picture of her."

Sympathy tigger at Hiccup's heart, but he had to stay firm.

"I sent her down there, Hiccup," Stoick said plaintively. Fifteen years of anguish poured out of him. "I would do anything, anything to bring her back. That haunts me, and I know it haunts you too"

Hiccup's resolve melted in the face of his father's inescapable guilt and grief. He couldn't help imagining what would be left of him if something happened to Astrid...or Sam.

"It's time to come home, Dad," he said, his voice softening. "Come home with me"

The grateful look on his father's face was enough to break Hiccup's heart. He swallowed hard and wiped at his eyes, obviously touched by his son's offer. Hiccup prayed that he had gotten through to him.

"We'll leave tomorrow," Hiccup said.

Stoick hesitated, just for a moment, but then he nodded. Emotionally exhausted, he could only murmur a quiet, "Yes."

Hiccup sighed in relief. Maybe this could be the start of a whole new beginning for them. He reached out and squeezed his dad's shoulder.

"Let's get some sleep," he said.

Hiccup blinked and opened his eyes. The apartment was still dark; the sun had yet to rise. He rested upon the futon, getting his bearings. He then heard his father speaking softly in his bedroom. Hiccup strained his ears to listen in.

"Yes, yes," Stoick whispered. "The northeast section, that's good. There's never a patrol."

Hiccup came fully awake. He rose quietly from the futon and crept toward the bedroom. The light of a single lamp spilled into the living room. Hiccup checked his wristwatch. It would be dawn soon. He peered into the bedroom to see what his father is doing. The older man was already up and dressed, his dark clothes more suitable for a burglary than a trip to the airport. He whispered into his phone as he furtively packed a selection of files and electronic equipment into a duffle bag. Hiccup's heart sank. Stoick didn't look like he was packing for a trip home.

"Ten minutes," Stoick whispered. "Arigato."

He ended the call and put away the phone , only to see Hiccup staring at him from the doorway. Anger and disappointment warred upon the younger man's features.

I should've known, Hiccup thought bitterly. "What the hell are you doing?"

Caught red-handed, Stoick didn't bother trying to deny anything. "I'm heading out there, Hiccup— one hour, in and out."

Hiccup shook his head. "I don't think so."

"You want closure?" Stoick challenged him, not backing down. "You want to go home? That's where I'm going. Now you can come with me or not, your choice, but I don't have much time left to work this out and I'll be damned if I let it happen again!" He kept on packing, defiantly. "I came back here and I wasted six years staring through that barbed wire thinking it was a military mistake or some horrible design flaw they were trying to cover up. I kept looking at the hard science. What I knew. One day I'm tutoring a kid whose studying whale songs, I'm looking at his textbookâ€" 'Soundscape Interception,' 'Echolocation.' I'm looking at these graphs and diagrams and I realized that all the data I had been going crazy over before the plant blew wasn't something structural, it was a leaking turbine or a submarine. It was language. It was talk. Hard science wasn't the answerâ€"this was biology."

Hiccup had no idea what his dad was talking about. He watched in dismay as Stoick fished a ratty old radiation suit. The suit resembled the ones the workers had used at the plant fifteen years ago, the type his mother had supposedly been wearing when she died. He wondered how the hell Stoick had managed to get his hands on it.

"I met a guy who runs a cargo boat off-shore," Stoick continued, trying to get it all out before Hiccup could interrupt him. "Every day he goes right past the reactor site. He dropped off a couple monitors on buoys for me." He shook his head at the memory.

"Nothing. A year of nothing. More than a year."

Years of frustration could be heard in Stoick's voice.

"Two weeks ago, I tune in and ohmigod, there it is. Whatever it is that's in there, whatever it is they're guarding so carefully, it started talking again. And I mean talking. I need to get back to the house. I need my old disks if they're still there. The answer's in that data. I need to know that what caused this wasn't me, Hiccup. That I'm not who you think I am. I'm not crazy. That wasn't just a reactor meltdown. Something's going on there. I need to find the truth and end this. Whatever it takes."

Hiccup tried to make sense of his father's impassioned outpouring. Was it possible that Stoick actually knew what he was talking about? Probably, Hiccup suspected, but one thing at least was clear: that was never going to be over for Stoick Haddock until he got the answers he was looking for.

Hiccup shook his head. He couldn't believe he was actually considering what he was considering.

"You got another one of those suits?" he asked.

## 7. Chapter 6

The two men changed into the radiation suits. Lord knows suits like those had not saved Hiccup's mom so many years ago. The skiff pulled up to a rotting dock that was missing several timbers. Hiccup and Stoick stepped cautiously onto the dock. It was a long hike up from

the coast, made slower by the heavy suits, which forced them to pause for breaks every half-mile or so. The sun had begun to sink toward the horizon.

One hour, in and out, my ass, Hiccup thought.

Janjira was nothing like he remembered. Evacuated fifteen years ago, and cut off from the outside world ever since, the once-bustling community had become a ghost town overnight. Abandoned cars and trucks rusted in the empty streets. Weeds sprouted from the pavement, while moss and vines shrouded entire buildings. A theater marquee advertised "The Blair Witch Project." Hiccup spied no evidence of vandalism or looting. Everything had been left exactly how it had been the day the reactor melted down. Hiccup found himself hoping they wouldn't have to pass by his old school. His memories of Miss Okada's classroom were fraught enough. He didn't need to see it in ruins. He figured they had the deserted streets to themselves, until a pack of wild dogs startled the men by padding around a corner. Hiccup's brow furrowed in confusion as he pulled his dad into a nearby alley to avoid crossing paths with the pack. Hiccup tried to orient himself, but the rusty street signs, all in Japanese, were of little help. His hope his father's memories were more reliable.

"Okay, which way?" He glanced around for Stoick, who seemed to have wandered off. "Dad?"

A freeway overpass crossed the road before them. Stoick paused in the shadow of the concrete supports and extracted a Geiger counter from his pack. Activating the device, he checked the gauge. Nothing. Stoick smirked behind his faceplate. He tapped the gauge just to make sure it wasn't stuck, but the needle still didn't budge. Next he consulted the radiation badge on his forearm. Sure enough, it was still green. Just as he'd expected. He reached for his helmet. Hiccup watched in horror as his father whipped off his protective helmet. Before he could do anything to stop him, Stoick tossed the headpiece aside and sucked in a deep breath of the supposedly contaminated air.

"Dad!" He cried out. "What are you doing?!"

A horrible thought flashed through Hiccup's mind. Had Stoick come all this way just to kill himself near where Mom had died?

But Stoick didn't look particularly suicidal. Instead a look of vindication transfigured his gaunt, careworn face. He pointed triumphantly at the telltale green radiation badge on his arm.

"It's clean, Hiccup! I knew it!" Stoick darted forward and showed Hiccup the readings on his Geiger counter. This was the most excited that Hiccup had seen his father in years. "The radiation in this place should be lethal...but there's nothing. It's gone. Something's absorbing it."

He warily unzipped his own helmet. He took off the protective mask and held his breath for a long moment before inhaling. He waited for airborne particles to sear his lungs.

"Trust me," Hiccup said. "It's completely safe."

He certainly sounded confident enough. Hiccup folded up his helmet

and tucked it into his belt, just to be safe. He had to admit it felt good to get his helmet off. A welcome breeze cooled his face.

Stoick inspected the street signs. He nodded in recognition.

"It's just left on the next street," he promised.

"The one before or after the rabid pack of dogs?"

Hiccup was surprised, but probably shouldn't have been, to discover that his father had held onto the keys of their old house all these years. Hiccup's throat tightened. A rush of emotion overwhelmed him and for a few moments all he could do was stand frozen amidst the deteriorating wreckage of his past, remembering happier days and how abruptly they had ended. He glanced at his father, concerned that the poignant surroundings might be too much for him, but Stoick Haddock was a man on a mission. He headed straight for his old office without pausing to look around. If this place brought back painful memories for Stoick, you wouldn't know it from his determined stride.

Nostalgia drew Hiccup irresistibly toward his old room. He smiled wryly at the dusty collection of toys strewn across the floor. One particular toy soldier caught his eye: a miniature Navy man, just like he promised Sam. Maybe this trip wouldn't be a total wild goose chase after all.

Stoick knew what he wanted and he knew where to find them. Old memories and associations lay in wait all around him, posed to strike, but he kept his family at bay. Now was no time to wallow in grief and self-pity. He had a job to do—and possibly a disaster to avert.

C'mon, c'mon, he thought impatiently. Where the hell are you?

Just when he was about to curse in frustration, the targets of his search turned up: fifteen dusty zip disks scattered across the floor near the desk. He realized belatedly that they must have been knocked off the desk by one of the convulsive tremors or blasts from that morning. He gathered up the disks, carefully blowing off the dust as he stowed them securely in his pack. At old family portrait, resting atop the desk, stopped him cold. He was held captive by the photo—of Stoick, Valka, and little Hiccup. For a moment, the rescued data was forgotten. He lifted the portrait from the desk, gazing at it intently. His hands shook and his eyes threatened to mist over. Lifting his gaze from the portrait, he noticed something bright and shiny over the doorway. Sunset, filtering through the window, was reflected off a homemade banner strung across the arch:

>"HAPPY BIRTHDAY, DAD!"<br>Stoick stared numbly at the banner, instantly transported back in time.

"He made you a sign, you know," Valka had said that morning.

It all came back to him now. Hiccup's overlooked banner. The surprise party that never happened. All the emotions he had been fending off snuck up on him, ambushing him. His elation over finally recovering the disks gave way to a profound welling of regret. It was time to go.

He was sealing up the bad when, unexpectedly, the house came to life. Bells, buzzers, shrieks, and applause suddenly blared from the living room as the TV set turned itself on, breaking the silence. At the same time, the desk lamp in the office crackled and sputtered only a few inches from Stoick's face. His dusty old computer booted up noisily.

Outside the hallway lights were flickering, too. Unnerved by activity, Stoick hoisted the duffel bag and went to investigate. He peered out the office door and made eye contact with Hiccup, who had just stuck his head out of his old bedroom. The two men looked at each other in confusion.

"Did you...?" Hiccup asked.

Stoick shook his head. "No I have no idea..."

Without warning, the pictures on the wall started rattling. For a heart-stopping moment, Stoick thought the tremors returned already, but then he recognized the thundering whoomp-whoomp-whoomp of a helicopter flying low over the house. Neither of them knew why a 'copter would be buzzing a house in the middle of the Q-Zone. It made no sense. This entire area was supposed to be a no-fly zone.

Stoick decided that he and Hiccup wet pressing their luck by sticking around. They needed to get back to the docks with their prizes.

The fading daylight did not make the return trip through the deserted city any less eerie. Another helicopter buzzed by overhead, and the two men ducked beneath the tattered awning of a vacant sidewalk café to avoid being spotted what appeared to be a large metal structure in the distance. Glowing lights illuminated a towering assemblage of new scaffolding and facilities—right where the nuclear power plant used to be.

He looked to his father in confusion. "Are they rebuilding the plant?"

Stoick stared at the distant complex intently, too transfixed by the sight to reply. Hiccup observed, his father didn't appear to be too surprised to find something happening at the old site, just as he theorized earlier. For the first time in years, Hiccup actually felt like Stoick Haddock had a better grip on what was going than he did.

He opened his mouth again, to ask his dad to explain, only to be interrupted by the unmistakable sound of an assault rifle being racked. Hiccup's mouth went dry.

The men turned around to find a pair of uniformed Japanese soldiers standing behind them, their Howa assault rifles aimed at the trespassers. Neither soldier was wearing a radiation suit, just ordinary camo gear. They shouted at the Americans in a torrent of angry Japanese. Hiccup couldn't make out what they were saying, but raised his hands in the air.

"What are they saying?" he whispered to Stoick.

Belligerent expressions conveyed a lack of hospitality.

"We're screwed," Stoick said.

## 8. Chapter 7

In case you guys are wondering, yes. I've seen "How to Train Your Dragon 2" and IT WAS AWESOME! So anyway here's Chapter 7

The control room, nicknamed the "crow's nest," was on the upper level of the installation, overlooking the pit. The tapered tip of the cocoon was almost level with the wide glass windows facing the sinkhole. State-of-the-art scientific equipment was crammed into the control room, along with a team of scientists and technicians. Monitors displayed readings from an impressive range of scanning devices, including infrared, spectrum analysis, backscatter x-ray, and others that Alvin couldn't immediately identify. Much of the apparatus bore labels reading

>"M.U.T.O."<p>

"Alvin," Dr. Mulch Conway greeted Alvin as he and Heather entered the control room. "Good timing. We've just had the luminary precursor. Seem to be due for another pulse."

The lead technician, a man named Jainway, leaned forward to speak into a microphone. "Ten seconds warning. Ten seconds."

Heather's phone rang and she stepped away to take the call. She nodded apologetically at Alvin as she took her leave of the control room. He joined Mulch by the windows.

"Six, five, four," Jainway counted down. "Three, two, one..."

The air around the cocoon rippled as it emitted a luminous pulse. The translucent shell of the cocoon convulsed, shaking off a cloud of dust along with bits of outer husk. The spasm caused the entire pit and the attached scaffolding to tremble slightly, which Alvin found more than a little unsettling. At the same time, electric lights flickered throughout the facility. Industrial-sized backup generators, installed for just such occasions, kicked in automatically to override the power drain. Alvin nodded in understanding. This was precisely the phenomenon Heather had described to him: a powerful electromagnetic pulse that disrupted all power systems in the vicinity. Powered by the radiation the organism inside the cocoon had been absorbing all these years. He wondered what else it was capable of.

With full power restored by the generators, the equipment within the crow's nest monitored the pulse.

"That was twelve-point-two seconds," Jainway reported. "We're trending exponentially and—" He rapidly worked his keyboard, collating and translating the latest data from the pulse. "—that's our new curve."

A distinctive waveform appeared on a central display screen. The pattern displayed a series of rising peaks, starting small at first, but quickly increasing in size and frequency. Alvin examined the display in fascination. The pattern matched no biological phenomenon he was familiar with. A hand tapped him on the shoulder. He turned to find Thomas Wilson, the base's head of security, behind him.



"Dr. Hamill," he said. "We arrested two men in the Q-Zone"

Mulch was annoyed by the interruption. "Can this wait? Have Dr. Whitman take a look."

"She did, sir," Thomas replied. "She sent me."

Mulch glanced around, as though noticing for the first time that Heather was no longer present. Alvin recalled her being called during the countdown to the pulse.

"One says he used to work her," Thomas said.

Alvin found Heather waiting for him outside the utility room, while an armed soldier stood guard at the locked glass door to the larger room beyond. A table held what Alvin assumed to be the trespassers' confiscated belongings. Looking troubled, Heather nodded grimly at Alvin as he arrived. They peered through the clear glass door as one of Thomas's subordinates, attempted to question the distraught prisoner, whom had been identified as Stoick Haddock. Alvin wondered what had brought the man back to this site, some fifteen years later.

"I want my son," Stoick demanded, visibly upset. "I want to see him. I want to know he's alright." He pointed accusingly at the guard posted outside the door. "This guy knows where he is. I want my son and I want my bag and my disks and I want to talk to the person who's in charge here. I know what's going on, okay?"

Alvin listened with interest.

Thomas's subordinate tried to calm the prisoner. "Mr. Haddock"

"You've been telling everybody this place is a death zone," Stoick ranted. "All the while you've been hiding something out there! My wife died here! You understand? Something killed my wife and ten other people, and I deserve answers!"

Alvin recalled that several lives had indeed been lost during the meltdown, although the death toll could have been much, much worse had not all necessary emergency measures been taken in time. Curious, he rifled through the man's possessions, finding a framed family photo, along with over a dozen obsolete zip disks and a collection of graphs and printouts.

"I thought all the data from that day was lost," he whispered to Heather.

She glanced at Stoick's collection. "Guess he was doing homework."

Leafing through the confiscated material, Alvin froze as he came upon a crumpled computer printout of a certain waveform pattern. He recognized the rising series of crests immediately. It was the same curve he had just observed on the monitors upstairs. Snatching up the printout, he turned excitedly toward Heather just as the overhead lights flickered once more, even more noticeably this time. The electromagnetic pulses from the cocoon were indeed increasing in

intensity.

"See?!" Stoick exclaimed "There it is again! It knocks out everything electrical for miles!" The foundations beneath their feet rumbled as the lights continued to waver, despite the best efforts of the backup generators. Stoick grew louder and more agitated. His face grew flushed and the tendons in his neck stood out.

"It's what caused this whole thing, and it's happening again. IT'S GONNA SEND US BACK TO THE STONE AGE!"

A technician from the control room rushed into the antechamber.  
"Dr. Hamill, they need you upstairs! We have a problem."

Alvin glanced back and forth between Stoick and the confiscated printout. He stared apprehensively at Stoick and their eyes met through the glass door between them. Alvin wanted to stay and question the man directly, find out what precisely Stoick knew about the events fifteen years ago, and how they are related to what was happening today, but the technician from the crow's nest hovered in doorway, waiting anxiously. He hastily gathered up Stoick's possessions and rushed to answer the summons. He shouted back at Thomas and the Guard.

"Keep that man here! I need to talk to him!"

Heather accompanied Alvin as they reached back to the control room, which is now in a barely controlled frenzy. Emergency alerts and warnings flashed urgently on almost every screen and console. Buzzers and sirens sounded. Alarmed technicians shouted over each other.

"Just seconds part!" Jainway called out.

Another man, whose name Alvin didn't know, stared in dismay at the readings before him. "€"stronger, broad spectrum!"

Mulch paced back and forth, chewing on his nails. His earlier jubilation had vanished completely, replaced by oblivious worry and agitation. His historic breakthrough was turning into a disaster.

"Any radiation leakage?" he asked fearfully.

A large tremor shook the crow's nest as the cocoon emitted an even stronger pulse. Down below, the mammoth cocoon flexed and heaved, causing great hunks of its rocky outer shell to shear off and crash onto the metal grille covering the floor of the pit. Tiny figures, their movements hampered by their cumbersome radiation suits, scrambled for safety as the chunks of the shell tumbled down onto the expensive equipment like a rockslide, smashing portions of the sensor array to pieces. As the outer layer of the cocoon disintegrated, more and more of the infernal red glow within it was exposed.

"What the hell is it doing?" Jainway asked.

"Gamma levels still zero," his fellow technician reported, with audible relief. "It's sucked all three reactors dry."

Alvin held out Stoick's blueprint. "It's done feeding."

Puzzled, Mulch grabbed the document from Alvin. He peered at it uncomprehendingly. "What's this?"

"Fifteen years ago," Alvin explained. "It's what caused the meltdown."

Heather had put the pieces together as well. "It was an electromagnetic pulse," she said, chiming in. "That's what it's building to converting all that radiation."

"We need to shut down," Alvin said.

Mulch blanched at the prospect. "You're sure this is authentic?"

Alvin nodded, wishing he'd found out about Stoick Haddock's findings years ago. The exact connection between the meltdown and the cocoon had always been unclear, but Alvin now realized that an EMP produced by the larva had shut down the plant's safety systems back in 1999. His grave expression and bearing convinced Mulch to heed his warning.

"Secure the grid!" the scientist ordered. "Wildfire protocols!"

Jainway pressed a button, sounding an alarm. He relayed Mulch's orders into his microphone. "All personnel, clear the first perimeter, immediately!"

Klaxons blared throughout the base. Outside the crow's nest, the generators were cranked up to full capacity as the six looming construction cranes went into operation. Gears engaged and motors roared as the cranes stretched a net of thick steel cables above the pit.

Just in case anything tried to escape.

NOTE: the voice actor for Bucket is Thomas F. Wilson, you may know him as Biff from "Back to the Future"

## 9. Chapter 8

Wailing klaxons penetrated the walls of the security van, causing Hiccup to start in alarm. Desperate to figure out what was happening, he peered out the rear window of the van. He spotted heavy steel cables winding from the base of a towering construction crane, which had just swung into action. He couldn't make out what the cables are attached to. Radios squawked outside the van. Hiccup saw guards rushing past.

"Hey!" he shouted, trying to get their attention. Had everyone forgotten that he was handcuffed inside the van? He yelled over the blaring klaxons. "HEY!"

His shouts went unheeded.

Alvin watched from the crow's nest as the tech crews on the lower levels of the pit scrambled out of the way as the huge wire "cage"

descended, sealing the cocoon inside, even as another layer of the outer shell broke loose, sloughing onto the floor of the pit with tremendous force. The pulses were growing steadily in strength. Emergency measures were hurriedly deployed, but Alvin got a definite sense that matters were spiraling out of control.

"Grid secure!" Jainway called out as the high-tension netting stretched taut above the quivering cocoon. The technician let out a sigh of relief, which Alvin feared might be premature. After all, the cage had never been tested. Everyone present knew what came next. Jainway's hand hovered above a switch. He looked to Mulch for the go-ahead.

"Say the word," the technician said.

Mulch, for his part, appeared overwhelmed by the responsibility that has fallen on him. He looked in turn to Alvin, who sympathized with the stricken scientist. There was no easy decision.

"So much we still don't know," Mulch moaned

Down in the pit, the cocoon shuddered again, shedding yet another layer of shell. With each layer, more and more of the unearthly effulgence at the core of the cocoon could be seen, although the organism within remained hidden from view.

"Kill it," Alvin said.

Mulch let Alvin make the call. He nodded to Jainway, who threw the switch. Thousands of volts electrified the metal grille at the base of the cocoon. Bright blue flashes crackled across the flooring. The cocoon sizzled and convulsed as the electricity arced across its outer shell, jolting it with bolts of artificial lightning. Smoke rose from its cracking outer shell. Floodlights and fuses blew, throwing the entire pit into darkness. Heather gasped, and Mulch looked away from the window. On the monitors, the data feeds all went silent. A hush fell over the control room.

"All readings are flat-lining," Jainway reported.

"Is it dead?" Mulch asked.

Alvin peered down into the murky pit. As nearly as he could tell, the cocoon remained intact, apart from a single long crack splitting its surface. Shadows filled the gap, making it impossible to discern what lay deeper within the cocoon. The bioluminescent glow had been extinguished. No sound or motion could be detected from this height. The electricity appeared to have done the trick, but Alvin remained on edge. There was too much at stake to take any chances.

"Get a visual," he instructed.

Down in the pit, a work crew cautiously approached the charred cocoon. The leader of the team, Dagur, ignited a handheld flare. An incandescent red glow cast light on the deep, jagged crack running up the blackened exterior of the deep looming cocoon. He peered up at the crack, but saw only a still, silent darkness. The team drew nearer to the cocoon. Dagur was about to report back to the control room, when he thought he spotted a glimmer of movement through the crack. He squinted into shadows, while the rest of his team started

shouting and pointing excitedly. They could all it now: Elusive shapesâ€"no, a single shapeâ€"stirring inside the cocoon, right before their eyes.

>Dagur's mouth went dry. He began to back away warily. A deafening howl erupted from the cocoon, echoing off the walls of the pit. Terrified, Dagur and his team turned and run frantically for their lives. They didn't get far.<p>

A bone-rattling shock wave blasted from the cocoon, flinging the fleeing workers across the floor. The concussive force disintegrated what remained of the cocoon, causing it to crumble into dust, even as a tremendous electromagnetic pulse blew through the air, Dagur was already dead. The creature howled again.

The van rattled as though a bomb had gone off nearby. The dome-light in the ceiling, which had been flickering on and off, went out completely, leaving Hiccup trapped in the dark. The blaring klaxons ceased abruptly, while a sudden blackout seemed to hit the entire facility. All the lights outside went dark simultaneously, so that only faint starlight illuminated the scene. The motorized cranes whirled to a stop. Hiccup was trying to figure out what was happening, and whether he'd been completely forgotten, when the thunderous howl of some unknown creature rang out over the chaos. Hiccup realized instantly. The ululating cry was unmistakably coming from something alive. He couldn't believe his ears, and a primordial fear gripped his heart.

Stoick found himself alone in the improvised interrogation room. The guards had run off, distracted by the crisis, which had apparently caught them by surprise. The lights went out, just as they had at the plant years ago. He heard an electronic lock click as the power shorted. He tried the door and found it unlocked. Cautiously sticking his head out the door, he glanced around and didn't see any more guards in the vicinity. He wasn't surprised. This was his chance, he realized, to find out the truth at last.

Along with his fellow scientists, Alvin stared down into the abyss, which was lit only by the intermittent strobing of the emergency lights. The steel-mesh net over the pit remained intact, further obscuring his view of the creature below, which had obviously survived their attempt to electrocute it. They had sent enough voltage through the grid to fry a great white whale, but the creature was still alive and free from its cocoon. He caught sporadic glimpses of gigantic red eyes and gleaming fangs. The creature heaved upward, shaking the entire pit. The crow's nest bucked beneath Alvin's feet, and he had to grab onto a window sill to maintain his balance. Heather stumbled against him, her face pale.

"Everyone out!" Mulch shouted. "Now!"

His palm slammed down on a panic button.

Stoick made his way through the unfamiliar complex, heading toward the center, even as a mass evacuation got underway, triggering a distinct sense of déjà vu. Stoick jostled through the tide of humanity. He alone was heading toward the source of the chaosâ€"and the inhuman howl.

I have to see it, he thought. I have to know what's down there.

Another deafening wail could be heard above the tumult. He forced his way along the gantries, drawn by the sound of the creature. The terrifying screech was proof that he wasn't crazy after all, that he had been right all along. He hoped Hiccup understood that now.

Trapped in the van, Hiccup found himself forgotten in the midst of an increasingly hellish nightmare. Fleeing workers and emergency crews raced past the van by the dozens, oblivious to the desperate American handcuffed inside the vehicle. He shouted frantically at the people running by. No one listened or even glanced in his direction. They were too busy trying to get away from...what?

Stoick crept along the gantry toward the pit. One level below, a crew of unusually courageous emergency workers warily approached the edge of the giant sinkhole. All at once, some enormous creature, it's exact contours obscured by darkness and a net of heavy steel cables, showed up against it's cage. An angry screech conveyed it's displeasure at being trapped. The earsplitting cry convinced the workers to turn and run like hell. Stoick didn't blame them; it was a natural response to the gargantuan monster trying to force itself out into the world. This could be his last chance to find out exactly what had destroyed the plant years ago" and why Valla died.

Luckily for the fleeing mortals, the creature retreated back into the pit after its failed attempt to breach the net. Stoick was impressed by the size of the cage, admiring the foresight and ingenuity of the engineers who had designed and implemented the ambitious safety measure. The creature's bellicose howl faded away. It appeared the cage had worked.

Thank God, Stoick thought. He wanted desperately to lay eyes on the creature, but that didn't mean he wanted to see it run amok.

Then a giant black appendage rose up through a gap in the cables. Stoick's eyes bulged at the sight. At first he thought it was a limb of some sort, but then he realized that it was actually just a single hooked claw. His mind reeled at this sheer scale that implied. For the love of God, how big was this thing? The crooked talon hooked onto the taut steel cables, gripping them. It began pulling downward on the net, exerting tremendous force. The heavy cables stretched and strained at their moorings. The catwalks overlooking the pit started to tip precariously as they were wrenched loose, so that they dangled at alarming angles above the sinkhole and the creature below. All six cranes, each over 150 feet tall, began to tip toward the pit like fishing poles being dragged down by an over-sized catch. Twisting metal squealed as if in agony. Stoick gasped at the gantry quaked beneath him. He stumbled backwards, away from the railing. Suddenly the ingenious steel "cage" didn't seem quite as impressive"or reassuring"as it had been only moments ago. Hearing metal shriek, he spun around and saw the groaning cranes begin to buckle and bend catastrophically. One by one, each crane gave way in sequence, crashing down like a row of towering dominoes.

Jesus Christ, Stoick thought. It's tearing this whole place down!

One of the cranes toppled over, falling straight toward Stoick.

Adrenalin and reflexes kicked in and he dived for safety only a heartbeat before the top of the crane crashed into the gantry right where he had been standing moments before. Amazed to find himself still alive.

This is insane, Hiccup thought. I can't die like this!

He fought the handcuffs with all his might. His wrist was raw and bleeding, but the cuffs still refused to yield. He stopped tugging in cuffs, recognizing the futility of his exertions.

"I'm sorry, Astrid, Sam, I tried my best." His heart broke at the prospect of never seeing his family again. "I always meant to come home to you."

A falling crane hit the rear of the van like a giant hammer, shearing off the rear doors and sending the parked vehicle into a spin. Hiccup cried out, but had no time to react to this heart-stopping shock. Held in place by the cuffs, which yanked viciously on his wrist and arm, he tumbled violently inside the spinning van. His body slammed into the interior wall, knocking the breath from him. Then, finally the van came to rest several yards away from its starting point. Dazed, his heart racing, Hiccup found himself staring out the missing back half of the van, which now faced the heart of the mysterious complex. There was a sudden silence—"until he heard what sounded like sturdy steel cables straining against some inconceivable force. Hurriedly checking the security rail, he felt a surge of excitement as he saw that the sturdy steel had been cracked by the accident. It took him a few anxious moments, but he managed to slide the cuffs off the rail, setting him free at last.

Yes! he thought. That's more like it!

Wasting no time, he clambered out of the wrecked van by way of its missing back half. He glanced around the darkened base, trying to get his bearings. The fallen crane lay between him and a steep ridge beyond. Metal cables continued to creak and groan. He started toward the scaffolding, wondering how on Earth he was going to find his father in this chaos, when frantic pounding seized his attention. He quickly spotted where it was coming from. A Japanese crane operator was trapped inside the control booth of the capsized crane. The compartment was partially caved-in, so that there was barely enough room for the man inside, and the exit door was a twisted mass of crumpled metal. From the look of things, his legs were probably broken. Frankly, it was a miracle he was still alive. He locked eyes with Hiccup, who hesitated, uncertain what to do.

Stoick spotted his son from his elevated vantage point atop the quaking gantry. Hiccup was down below, staring at the crushed operator booth of one of the fallen cranes. Stoick watched with growing concern as Hiccup stepped over a tangle of steel cables stretching between the crane and the net above the pit. The cables went taut as the creature tugged again at the bars of its cage, dragging the cables toward the pit. Hiccup didn't seem to realize that he was standing in the path of the cables, which were shifting toward him.

"Hiccup!"

Hiccup was too far away to hear Stoick's shouting over all the

commotion. Frantic, Stoick rushed along the wobbling gantry, forcing his way past a stampede of terrified workers. Stoick waved his hands in the air, yelling at the top of his lungs.

"HICCUP!"

But Hiccup still couldn't hear him. Unaware of the danger posed by the moving cables, he appeared intent on rescuing somebody trapped in the crane's demolished control booth. The cables jerk again with another powerful tug from below, which also jolted the gantry beneath Stoick. The elevated steel walkway creaked and teetered, tossing Stoick from side to side. His elbow smacked painfully into a guardrail, but Stoick barely noticed. He sprinted further across the steady gantry, even as everyone else scrambled in the opposite direction. The fear-maddened crowd thinned out, clearing his way as he raced to get within earshot of his son. His eyes widened in horror as the taut cables began to drag the entire crane toward the pit.

"HICCUP! GET BACK NOW!"

Hiccup heard his father shouting. Startled, he looked up to see Stoick staring down at him from an elevated walkway. He couldn't quite make out what his dad was yelling but the utter terror on Stoick's face was clear enough. Metal scrap loudly against the pavement, throwing off sparks, as the collapsed crane surged toward Hiccup hundreds of tons of lethal metal and machinery threaten to flatten them like a runaway train. He dived out of the way, forced to abandon the trapped operator. The crane swept past him, carrying the operator to his doom. Hiccup wondered briefly if the man had a family...

Stoick kept shouting at him from above. Scrambling to his feet, Hiccup looked up at his father again—"just as the plummeting crane hauled down the entire elevated gantry Stoick was standing on. Hiccup barely had time to register what was happening before the metal scaffolding collapsed, taking Stoick with it. Crumpled steel landed in a heap at the edge of the giant sinkhole, atop a jutting concrete edge.

"DAD!"

Hiccup rushed toward the wreckage, praying that Stoick was still alive somewhere in the towering pile of debris. He couldn't lose his father now, not like this! He needed to apologize to his dad for never really listening to him, for thinking he was crazy all these years. Something huge and heavy slammed into the pavement in front of him, blocking his path. A glistening black column suddenly stretched high above his head. Stumbling backwards, it took Hiccup a second to grasp that what he was seeing was an enormous spiked claw.

No, he thought. It's not possible. No animal can this big!

Then another jointed black limb stretched up from the depths of the pit and smacked down on the ground several yards behind Hiccup. And another. And another. Hiccup froze in terror. An iridescent black endoskeleton, made of a hard shell-like substance, covered a vaguely insectile behemoth with at least six limbs of varying sizes. Two sturdy hind legs, with "backwards"-jointed ankles, supported the bulk of the creature's weight, while a pair of elongated middle limbs



extended from the beast's armored shoulders. A much smaller pair of forearms, resembling those of a praying mantis, protruded from its upper thorax. Glittering red eyes peered out from beneath a flat triangular skull that almost look like a rattlesnake's. The sheer scale of the creature beggared the imagination. It had to be nearly two hundred feet tall. The beast kept rising higher and higher, straightening to reveal it's true, incredible size. It's armored back began to buck and bulge violently. Then it's molting back split open in two long parallel gashes, dozens of feet long. Glistening prongs of flesh emerged from the ruptured carapace, unfurling grotesquely into sleek black wings. No longer hunching, the creature rose up triumphantly, exalting in it's metamorphosis. It bloodcurdling screech could probably be heard for miles away. Spreading it's newborn wings, it took to the sky. Awestruck, Hiccup watched it fly away.

But to where?

## 10. Chapter 9

More than a day before:

>Sam woke up. Sunlight filtered through the bedroom curtains as he yawned and stectehed in bed. He was in no hurry to get up until he remembered that his dad was home and had promised to take him to the toy store today. He sprang out of bed and scampered toward the door in his pajamas. He smelled pancakes cooking in the kitchen and grinned in anticipation. He loved pancakesâ€”and so did his dad. Yet when he rushed into the kitchen, expecting to find both his parents, he found only his mother cooking over a griddle. Confused, he looked around, but his dad was nowhere to be seen. He noticed there were only two place settings laid out at the kitchen table. He knew what that meant.<p>

But he promised, Sam thought. He said he would still be here in the morning when I got up!

His mother heard him come in. She turned away from the stove to greet him. She gazed down at him sadly, forcing a smile.

"It's okay, babe," she said gently, "He'll be back soon."

Sam didn't understand. Had the Navy called Dad back already? He was supposed to be home for two weeks, not just one night!

His mom turned off the stove to comfort him. She knelt down and hugged him as she tried to explain why Dad was gone again.

"His daddy needed help."

Now:

>The sun rose over the ruined base. Black smoke rose from the rubble, darkening the sky. Emergency crews had begun the grisly process of carting away the remains of the deceased. Helicopters circled overhead, observing the devastation below. Survivors were being carried away on stretchers. Hiccup wandered directionlessly through the ruins, ignored and forgotten amidst the disaster scene. He stumbled clumsily over the rubble, attempting to stay out of the way of the emergency crews. He'd been searching all night for his father without any luck. For all he knew, Stoick was still buried beneath

the derbis. Exhausted and sore, he stubbornly worked his way down row after row of casualties. Worried and worn out, he almost walked by his dad without recognizing him, but then he spotted Stoick on a gurney, surrounded by harried nurses and medics, fighting to keep the injured man alive.<p>

"Dad!"

Hiccup rushed toward, trying to squeeze past the doctors and nurses, who refused to let him through. He peered anxiously over the shoulders of the busy medics, hoping that he hadn't found his father just in time to see him die. That would be too cruel. Stoick's eyes fluttered at the sound of Hiccup's voice. He squinted through a fog of pain at his son.

Not far away, Alvin also wandered through the ruins. His clothing was torn and rumpled. He and Heather had barely escaped the crow's nest before it had crashed to the ground, but many others had not been so lucky. He watched grimly as Mulch was zipped into a bag.

"Dr. Hamil!"

Alvin turned to see a U.S. Navy officer approaching him, accompanied by Heather and a Japan Self-Defense Force captain. A helicopter was revving up behind them, it's rotors stirring up the already dusty air.

"Captain Paul Savage," the American officer introduced himself, shouting to be heard over the 'coprer's spinning rotors.

"Tactical authority of this situation has been accorded to Admiral Mildew, Commander, US Naval Forces, Seventh Fleet, part of a joint task force. I'm told your organization has situational awareness of our unidentified organism?"

Alvin nodded.

"Then I'm going to have to ask you to join me," Savage said. He glanced around at the surrounding bedlam. "Are there any other personnel you need?"

Alvin considered the question. There was Heather of course; that went without saying. He noticed that Stoick Haddock, was lying injured on a gurney nearby. A young American, whom Alvin assumed to be Stoick's son, Hiccup, was looking on anxiously as paramedics scrambled to stabilize his father's condition. Alvin recalled the data that had even confiscated from Stoick. Alvin had made sure that the disks and charts survived the disaster, but, now more than ever, he wanted to know everything the trespassing engineer knew about the nuclear disaster fifteen years ago. He pointed decisively at Haddock and son.

"Them."

## 11. Chapter 10

The transport chopper roared through the sky toward the USS Saratoga, a Nimitz-class nuclear-powered super carrier more than a thousand feet in length. Aboard the 'copter, Hiccup stuck close to his dad

while trying to keep up with their rapidly changing situation.

Hang on, Dad, he thought. Just a few more minutes.

A medic struggled to keep Stoick alive, monitoring the battered engineer's vital signs, but seemed to be fighting a losing battle.

"You were right," Hiccup said, squeezing Stoick's hand. His eyes welled up. His throat tightened. "I'm sorry."

Stoick gazed up at Hiccup through bloodshot eyes. His voice was weak and raspy as he struggled to speak. Hiccup leaned in to hear him.

"Whatever it takes," he said faintly. "You have to end this..."

He began to slip away, perhaps for good.

"Whatever it takes..."

"Dad, stay with me!" Hiccup exclaimed. "Dad!"

Stoick's eyes lost focus, staring somewhere beyond this world. Hiccup watched helplessly as the medic scrambled to save his failing patient, who was fading fast...

The Saratoga's Combat Direction Center, located below decks, was packed and buzzing.

"Okay! Listen up!" Captain Savage said, taking the floor. "Quiet please!" He waited, but not for long, for the general chatter and hubbub to die down.

"Briefing is up. New faces. New info. From here out, we do not try to move quickly, we will move quickly." He turned to introduce a figure to his right. "Admiral?"

A senior officer, with cropped white hair and a lean, taciturn face, stepped forward. He gestured at a monitor displaying a blurry image of the creature that had emerged from the cocoon. Hushed voices murmured in awe.

"Good afternoon," the admiral said crisply. "A 'massive unidentified terrestrial organism,' which this point forward will be referred to as 'MUTO.' The world still thinks this was an earthquake, and it would be preferable if that were to remain so. It was last sighted heading east across the Pacific. However, this... animal's electromagnetism has been playing havoc with radar, satellite feeds, you name it, leaving us, for the moment, blind as bats."

A frown deepened the well-earned creases on his face.

"I emphasize 'for the moment' because I have every confidence in the world that you will find it. We have to."

His remarks concluded, he surrounded the floor and sought out Alvin at the back of the room. He extended his hand.

"Doctor Hamill," the admiral greeted him. "Mildew Root. We're glad to

have you aboard."

Alvin accepted Mildew's hand. He spied Heather beckoning to him from the open hatchway to the command center. He had dispatched her earlier to examine

Stoick Haddock's findings. He nodded back to her in acknowledgement. He was anxious to hear what she had to say.

"Will you excuse me, Admiral?"

Stoick Haddock's face looked more at peace than it had been for at least fifteen years. His eyes were closed forever, seeing only the next world. Hiccup could only hope that, whatever had become his father's tortured spirit, somewhere Stoick was gazing on his wife's beloved face once more. Hiccup stood numbly in the Saratoga's medical bay as the body bag holding his father's remains was zipped shut. A medic offered him a sympathetic look, but Hiccup was too stunned to respond. The tears would come in time, he hoped, but right now he just felt drained and lost. San Francisco seemed more than a world away. He wondered how he was going to break this news to Sam and Astrid. Sam had never really known his grandfather. Would he even understand that now he never would?

"Lieutenant Hiccup Haddock, sir?"

A young petty officer intruded on Hiccup's grief, as gently as he could. "Would you please come with me?"

Alvin and his team had been assigned guest quarters upon the Saratoga. Monarch scientists worked beside Navy technicians, monitoring data feeds at various workstations, even as Alvin and Heather each spoke urgently on their respective phones.

"Yes," he reported, "the patterns match, but I can't crack the significance."

Stoick Haddock's antique zip disks, rescued from the MUTO base, were stacked on a desk beside Alvin's research materials. He overheard Heather dealing with the public-relations issue.

"Yes sir," she said into her phone. "Media is reporting an earthquake. The cover's holding for now, but if it-"

A knock at the hatchway interrupted both phone calls. Heather went to answer it.

"Dr. Hamill?" the Petty Officer stood in the doorway. He had Hiccup Haddock with him. Alvin nodded at the Petty Officer. The Petty Officer departed and Heather escorted Hiccup into the room. Hiccup approached the desk warily.

"Mr. Haddock, my condolences," Alvin said.

Hiccup starred at them. Pain, anger, and confusion all seemed to simmer inside the unfortunate young man, who was understandably overwhelmed by recent events. Powerful emotions played across Hiccup's face, while his body language was tense. Alvin began to fear that the grieving lieutenant would be of little use to their investigation. Heather tried to secure Hiccup's cooperation

anyway.

"We're deeply sorry for your loss, Lieutenant. But I'm afraid we need your help. Your father's data--"

"No, you first," he snapped. His nerves and temper were obviously at the breaking point. "Who are you people?"

Heather shot a questioning look at Alvin, letting him make the call. He nodded, regarding Hiccup with sympathy.

"Come in please, Mr. Haddock. Come in and we will show you."

Hiccup stepped deeper into the cabin. Heather shut the door behind him.

Flickering images played upon the wall of the cabin. Hooked into Heather's laptop, a portable digital projector provided relevant visuals as Alvin attempted to explain.

"In 1954," he began, "the first time a nuclear submarine ever reached the lowest depths, it awakened something."

"The Americans first thought it was the Russians," Heather added. "The Russians thought that it was the Americans. All those nuclear tests in the Pacific? Not tests..."

"They were trying to kill it." Alvin indicated the ancient film footage from the 1950's. "Him."

Hiccup's jaw dropped. Breaking eye contact with Alvin, he looked more closely at the projected images of the 1954 A-bomb detonation, the bomb with the cartoon lizard inscribed on its cone, a mushroom cloud rising over the once-tranquil Pacific Ocean, and finally, impossibly, the grainy silhouette of a titanic beast rising up from the sea, a row of jagged fins dimly visible along its spine.

"An ancient alpha predator," Alvin explained

"Millions of years older than mankind," Heather said, "from a time when the Earth was ten times more radioactive than it is today. The animal--and others like it--consumed that radiation as a food source. But as radiation levels on the surface naturally subsided, these creatures adapted to live deeper in the oceans, farther underground, absorbing radiation from the planet's core. The organization we work for, Monarch, was established in the wake of this discovery. A multinational organization, formed in secrecy, to search for him, study him, learn everything we could."

"We call him Godzilla," Alvin said.

"The top of a primordial ecosystem," Heather elaborated. "A god for all intents and purposes."

Hiccup gaped at the images, struggling to process what he was hearing and seeing. "A monster?"

"That is one word for them," Alvin agreed. He used a handheld remote to call up the images of the "cavern" in the Philippines. "Fifteen years ago, we found the fossil of another giant animal in the

Philippines. Like Godzilla, but this creature died long ago, killed by these..." Close-ups of the MUTO spores appeared on the wall.

"Pacific organisms," Heather said. "One dormant, but the other hatched. Catalyzed when a mining company unknowingly drilled into it's tomb. The hatchling burrowed straight for the nearest source of radiation, by your father's power plant in Janjira, and cocooned there. Absorbing the radioactive fuel to gestate, grow."

"Until it hatched like a butterfly into the creature you saw," Alvin said. "We call it a MUTO."

"You're saying you knew about this...thing...the whole time?" Hiccup shook his head, trying to take it all in. "And kept it a secret? Lied to everyone?"

"You have a son, Mr. Haddock. Would you tell him there are monsters in the world? Beyond our control? We believed that horror was better kept buried."

"But you let it feed?" Hiccup said. "Why not kill it when you had the chance?"

"It was absorbing radiation from the reactors," Heather said. "Vast does, like a sponge. We worried killing it might have released that radiation, endangering millions."

Alvin nodded. "The MUTO caused the catastrophe, but also prevented it from spreading. That's why Monarch's mission was to contain it, to study it's biology. To understand it."

"We knew the creature was having an electrical effect on everything within a close proximity," Heather said. "What we didn't know what was that it could harness that same power in an EMP attack. Your father did, he predicted it."

"What else did he say?" Alvin asked. "Anything at all?"

"I-I don't know," Hiccup confessed, his voice cracking. "I always thought he was crazy, obsessed. I didn't listen." He ran a hand through his hair, overwrought. "He said it was some kind of animal call. Like something...talking."

"Talking?" Alvin sat up straight.

Hiccup nodded. "Yeah, he was studying something. Echolocation."

Alvin and Heather stared at each other in shock. Hiccup clearly had no idea what a bombshell he'd just dropped, but the two scientists grasped the implications.

"If the MUTO was talking that day," Alvin reasoned, "your father must have discovered something talking back."

Gripped by a sense of extraordinary urgency, he turned to Heather. "Go back through the data, search for a response call."

She sat down at her laptop, while the projector continued to cycle

through the relevant images. Alvin slumped down into a chair. Hiccup stared at the wall, trying to make sense of it all. It was a lot to absorb.

"This parasite...it's still out there," he said. "Where's it headed?"

"The MUTO is still young, still growing," Alvin said. "It will be looking for food."

"Sources of radiation," Heather added, glancing up from her labtop. "We're monitoring all known sites, but if we don't find it soon..."

"It killed both my parents," Hiccup said. "There must be something we can do."

Alvin had his doubts, at least as far as humanity's ability to cope with the threat.

"Nature has an order, Mr. Haddock. A power to rebalance."

He stared up at the wall, where Godzilla could be glimpsed once more.

"I believe he is that power."

## 12. Chapter 11

Standing on the wide rear deck of the Saratoga, as the sun slowly sank into the horizon, Hiccup saluted stoically as his father's body was put to rest. Alvin was present as Stoick Haddock's flag-draped body slid off the deck into the sea. It disappeared quickly beneath the churning waves.

"Goodbye, Dad," Hiccup said. "I wish you could go home with me."

The Petty Officer was waiting off to one side, maintaining a respectful distance while Hiccup bid farewell to his father, but Hiccup knew he had to get going if he wanted to make it back to Astrid and Sam. It was time to go.

"Right now we're fifty miles off Hawaii," the Petty Officer explained. "This transport will take you there. You're on a commercial flight back to San Francisco."

Hiccup was grateful for the arrangements made on his behalf, especially everything else that was going on. The chopper's rotors were already spinning up. Within moments, the helicopter lifted off from the flight deck, carrying Hiccup away from the Saratoga. In all the chaos and tragedy of the last forty-eight hours, there'd been no chance to even try to get in touch with Astrid back in San Francisco. He wished he was bringing back better news.

The TV news was on the background as Astrid and Sam fixed dinner in the kitchen. Although the sound had been muted, a crawl played across the bottom of the screen:

"EARTHQUAKE ROCKS NORTHERN JAPAN - NUCLEAR Q-ZONE SHAKES."

The headline went unnoticed by Astrid, who was trying to put up a brave front for Sam despite her growing anxiety. Days had passed since Hiccup had left for Japan and yet there was still no word from him. Something had obviously gone wrong: otherwise he would have surely checked in by now. All she knew for certain was that his flight to Tokyo had touched down on time and that, according to the local police, he had bailed his dad out of jail at least two days ago. After that...nothing.

"Where are you, Hiccup? What's happened to you?"

Distracted, she dumped some loose scraps and peelings into the sink and ran the garbage disposal. The loud grinding noise drew a frown from Sam, who clapped his hands over his ears. Neither of them heard her LG mobile phone buzzing on the coffee table, one room away.

"This is Mommy's phone. Leave a message."

Hiccup swore inwardly as Astrid's phone went to voice mail. The sound of his son's voice hit him harder than he had anticipated, but he needed to talk to Astrid more than anything. He clutched a borrowed satellite phone as the transport chopper carried him over the Pacific. He raised his voice to be heard over the whirring rotors.

"Astrid..."

His voice faltered. The conversation he'd been rehearsing instantly flew out of his head, rendering him flustered and at a loss for words.

"I don't know what they're saying on the news. There was an...accident...in Japan. Dad's...gone." His eyes welled up. His throat tightened so he could hardly speak. "Listen. I'm almost to Hawaii. I've got a flight home. I love you both. Tell Sam Daddy's coming home, okay? I'm coming home."

The voice mail beeped, cutting him off. Hiccup put down the phone. Wiping his eyes, he peered out across the crystal blue waters below to the Hawaiian Islands directly ahead. He prayed that Astrid would get the message.

Alvin and Heather huddled before a glowing monitor in the Saratoga's war room as a helpful petty officer uploaded Stoick Haddock's data onto a display screen. The two scientists studied the telltale waveform as it plotted out across the screen.

"Keep scrolling," Heather instructed the technician. "Near the end, before the final pulse-"

Alvin's eyes widened. "There!" he blurted, pointing at the screen, where just before the end of the graph, one peak was followed directly by another-as if in reply. Heather gasped out loud. The evidence was undeniable, the conclusion inescapable.

"Something responded," Alvin said gravely. "He was right."

Heather lowered her voice. "You don't think it could be...?"



"Search for this pattern," he instructed.

Heather regarded him quizzically. "Where?"

"Everywhere," he said.

Another petty officer came up behind them.

"Doctors," the man said. "You need to see this."

"Terminal A, domestic gates."

Hiccup rushed through the busy commercial terminal at the Honolulu International Airport. He needed to hurry if he wanted to catch his flight to San Francisco. He found a seat on the train and slumped into it, completely worn out. At this point, he just wanted to get on a plane back to Astrid and Sam. Shifting his weight on the seat, and checking to make sure he still had his boarding pass, he felt something hard and lumpy in his pants pocket. He reached into his pocket and extracted the object. It was the old toy soldier he rescued from his childhood bedroom in Japan. He turned it over in his hands. He was glad he had managed to hold onto it-for Sam's sake. He glanced at his watch. It was after nine in San Francisco now. Sam was probably already in bed. Missing his son more than ever, Hiccup noticed another little boy, about Sam's age, on the platform outside. The boy peeked out from behind his mother's legs, while his distracted parents coped with their luggage and a map of the airport. Wide eyes stared in fascination at the toy soldier. Hiccup smiled back at him, amused.

A chime sounded, warning that Hiccup's train was about to depart.

"Aloha," the recorded voice said cheerily. "Please stay clear of the automatic doors-"

Distracted by the announcement, Hiccup forgot about the boy, until a woman's frantic voice called out abruptly.

"Akio?! Akio!"

On the platform, the boy's parents were looking around anxiously, having obviously misplaced their child. They cried out as they saw that Akio had darted onto the train when they weren't looking. Drawn by the toy soldier, Akio approached Hiccup. He pointed a pudgy finger at the miniature Navy Man.

"Ban-ban," he chirped.

Oh, shit, Hiccup thought, realizing what was happening. He leapt up to return the boy to his parents, but he was too late. The doors slid shut with a whoosh and the train began to pull away from the platform. Through the window's, Hiccup saw Akio's parents reacting in consternation. They dashed frantically to the edge of the platform, shouting and throwing out their arms.

"Stay there!" Hiccup shouted. "I'll bring him back!"

Hiccup looked down at Akio, who had suddenly become his

responsibility. He gave the boy a playfully stern expression.

"I better not miss my flight."

The Green Berets advanced through the nocturnal jungle, kitted out with hazard gas masks and night-vision goggles. The Alexander Nevsky, a

fourth-generation nuclear submarine, was standing upright among the trees, as though dropped from above. The twelve-man team spread out around the base of the misplaced sub, gazing up at the surreal sight.

"Guardian 3, this is Sparta 1," Captain Bill Cozzone reported via radio. "We've located the Russian sub. Break-"

Something stirred above the jungle canopy high overhead. Craning his head back, Cozzone spied the MUTO itself, crouched above the upright sub.

"Guardian 3, we also have eyes on your bogey."

The command center aboard the Saratoga immediately responded. "Sparta 1, Guardian 3. Six Actual requests a sit-rep, over."

To Cozzone's relief, the MUTO ignored the stunned Green Berets down on the forest floor. Instead it had torn open the hull of the Alexander Nevsky and was gorging on the glowing plutonium core of the nuclear reactor, gobbling down the red-hot fuel rods.

Cozzone tried to convey to Command what he was seeing.

"Guardian 3, tell the Six it's...uh...well, it appears to be eating the reactor."

### 13. Chapter 12

SORRY FOR THIS CHAPTER BEING SHORT, I AM JUST EXHAUSTED FROM WORK YESTERDAY, I JUST NEED TIME TO RELAX OH AND IF PEOPLE SAY THIS FANFIC IS UNORIGINAL WELL LET ME JUST SAY IT'S WAY BETTER THAN "RISE OF THE BRAVE TANGLED FROZEN DRAGONS"

The train glided toward the next terminal along the elevated track, which ran approximately thirty feet above the tarmac below. Hiccup lifted Akio onto a seat to await their stop.

Streaking through the sky, the Lightnings flew in formation toward the mountain range overlooking Honolulu. The lead pilot readied himself for combat against the MUTO. As the jets crested a rocky jungle ridge, the MUTO came into view, crouching above the bamboo trees. The F-35 was armed with both guns and missiles, which ought to be more than enough to take out the dangerous creature.

"Niner-niner," he reported. He aimed his cross-hairs at the MUTO, but, to his surprise, they bounced and wavered erratically, as though unable to lock onto the target. "What the-?!"

The cross-hairs kept sliding off the target.

"I'm getting all sorts of guidance errors," he reported. "Switching to manual."

He reached to flip the switch, just as the MUTO reared up on its hind legs and began glowing brighter than before. A rippling aurora charged the air around it, only a heartbeat before it slammed its upper limbs down, generating a visible electromagnetic pulse.

The captain's entire cockpit display went black. He fought to maintain control of the plane even though all of its electrical systems had shorted out instantaneously. Flaming out, the disabled aircraft spiraled down toward the jungle floor, where the Green Berets scrambled to get out of the way. The crashing fighter jet slammed into the earth with stupendous force. Seconds later, a huge orange fireball billowed up above the trees.

All at once, the entire airport lost power. Agitated voices filled the train as the overhead lights sputtered out, leaving the passengers in darkness. The hellish red glow of rising flames could be seen from the airport, lighting up the night. Confused passengers murmured anxiously as they spied the distant inferno. No one else seemed to know what was happening, but Hiccup had a likely idea. His memory instantly flashed back to the creature from the pit.

#### 14. Chapter 13

THE CHAPTER YOU GUYS HAVE BEEN WAITING FORâ€|oh yeah

Less than a mile away, a huge reptilian beast rose up from the bay to tower Waikiki. Torrents of cascading seawater veiled the monster's form so that only the titanic proportions of the leviathan were revealed. Standing erect on two legs, the monster was nearly four hundred feet tall and solidly built, with a broad chest and brawny forearms. A pair of enormous jaws, opened wide, but the creature's roar was drowned out by the urgent wail of a tsunami warning. A massive tidal wave surged onto the shore. Terrified vacationers ran in panic, seeking higher ground, as the tsunami roared over the beach to flood the crowded streets and buildings beyond. The roar of the wave died away, only to be supplanted by a series of thunderous impacts, getting closer and closer. Boom. Boom. BOOM!

Flares shot up like fireworks from the hotel rooftops. Flashes of blood-red light offered glimpses of the gigantic creature emerging from the bay and stomping through the flooded streets. Snipers opened fire from the rooftops. Tracer bullets split the darkness, but the giant sea-monster kept striding forward. Smoke from the gunfire added to the confusion, but the furious barrage had no effect on the monster, which seemed to be heading toward the nearby hills.

Gasps of relief echoed inside the train as the lights flicker to life throughout the airport. It appeared that the power had been restored and the blackout was over. The train even started to move forward again. Hiccup felt a little better now that he and Akio weren't stuck in the dark anymore. He looked ahead anxiously, trying to spot the upcoming terminal. Skyward lights came back into service, illuminating a stretch of elevated track ahead. All seemed clear as the train rounded a curve and the reawakened spotlights revealedâ€|

The MUTO, straddling the track directly in front of them!

Pandemonium erupted aboard the train as the other passengers spied the gigantic winged monster directly ahead, but the automated train kept gaining speed, heading straight toward the creature. Fear-crazed passengers rushed toward the opposite end of the train. Hiccup tried to hold onto Akio, but the panicky stampede tore the boy from his grasp. Akio was swept away by the mob, even as the train sped toward the monster. Hiccup sprang from his seat and dived after him.

An apache helicopter swooped down from the sky, adding to the tumult. It soared past the head, right overhead. Hiccup kept his eye on Akio, who was trying to get back to him. Lunging forward, Hiccup tackled the boy to the floor just as the Apache opened fire on the MUTO. Its 30mm automatic cannon blasted loudly in the night, unleashing a barrage of ammo at the crouching creature, which reacted angrily. Howling in protest, it swiped at the chopper with one of its enormous middle limbs. The elusive 'copter dodged the swipe, but the monster's flailing limb smashed through the front of the train as well the elevated track beneath it. Horrified screams were drowned by the din of shredded metal and shattered concrete. The rest of the train continued over the edge of the splintered track, but caught on mangled steel supports and dangled precariously over the rubble below.

Hiccup struggled to hold onto Akio while simultaneously anchoring himself to one on the upright metal poles in the middle of the aisle. Shrieking men and women tumbled past them, nearly knocking Hiccup loose. Gravity tugged on Akio, briefly yanking him from Hiccup's grip. Screaming, the boy started to slide awayâ€|

No! Hiccup thought desperately, scrabbling to reach the boy.

He grabbed the boy's wrist and held on tight. He hauled Akio up into his arms and the boy clung to him for his life. Hiccup wondered how long they could keep from falling, and whether it made any difference with the MUTO several yards away. Hiccup stared at the creature, which had already been responsible for his father's death, not to mention his mother's fifteen years ago. Was this same monster going to kill him now-and leave Sam fatherless as well?

The MUTO tracked the Apache 'copter with its crimson eyes, appearing eager to swipe at it once more, but paused as a series of loud booms, approaching from the east, echoed across the tarmac. The sound instantly captured the MUTO's attention. Still hanging onto Akio, Hiccup shuddered to think what could possibly frighten the giant winged monster.

Seismic footsteps pounded upon the tarmac, which cracked beneath the tread of two gigantic clawed feet.

"Oh my God", Hiccup said. He instantly recognized the legendary beast the two scientists had told him about, the one the Navy tried to nuke sixty years ago. "It's really him."

Godzilla was here.

Sam was curled up on the living room couch. His sleeping face was lit

by the flickering glow of the TV set, where a breaking news story had interrupted regular programming on practically every channel. The volume was turned down low, but the screen was consumed by startling images from Hawaii.

Sensing danger, the MUTO turned and fled from Godzilla, flapping its wings in a desperate attempt to escape. Abandoning Oahu, it soared out over the open sea, with Godzilla marching relentlessly in pursuit.

"Sammy?"

Astrid entered the living room, already dressed in her hospital scrubs. She found the boy still sleeping on the couch, looking so cute it hurts. Glancing at the TV, she saw a morning news anchor intoning silently behind a desk but she didn't pay attention. She still had some time to kill before she had to head over to the hospital, so she drew the afghan back over to Sam to keep him warm. He stirred slightly as she adjusted the blanket. His eyes fluttered briefly, looking past her, and then opened wide. All of a sudden, he was wide awake and staring at the TV behind her.

"Mommy! Look!"

Puzzled, she turned toward the televisionâ€¦

## 15. Chapter 14

The sun rose over the beach at Waikiki. Both civilian and military medical tents had been erected along the scorched coastline, while scores of stressed-out first responders coped with the wounded, the homeless, and the traumatized. For the second time in as many days, Hiccup found himself wandering through the aftermath of a devastating monster attack, except that this time he had a lost child in his arms. After being rescued from the damaged monorail, he and Akio had been bussed with numerous other survivors to the beach, which is now the center of the relief efforts. He carried the trembling child into one of the larger Red Cross tents. Hiccup found himself feeling oddly grateful for Godzilla's timely intervention. He wondered where Alvin was and what he thought of Godzilla's return.

"Excuse me?" Hiccup called out, trying to get someone's attention. "This boy's been separated from his parents. I'm-"

"Akio! Akio!"

A woman's voice cried out frantically. Hiccup spun around and saw the boy's parents shoving their way through the crowd. Tears of joy streamed down the couple's faces. Akio lept from Hiccup's arms and ran straight to his mother and father. The family moved off, seeking whatever help or safety could be found. Hiccup silently wished them luck. Suddenly on his own, Hiccup now had only one thing on his mind. Scanning the crowd around him, his eyes zeroed in on a cell phone in the hands of a passing survivor. He needed to get hold of Astrid and let her know that he was okay and trying to get back to her and Sam.

A contingent of U.S. military personnel, from every branch of the service, entered the tent. Hiccup hurried up to them. He approached

an Army soldier.

"Lieutenant Haddock, U.S. Navy," Hiccup introduced himself. "I was here on leave," Hiccup explained.

The soldier nodded, understanding.

"Excellent timing, Sir." He offered Hiccup a crisp salute. "Sergeant Fishlegs Ingerman."

"I need to get to the mainland," Hiccup said.

'Well' see, it really is your lucky day, Sir." Fishlegs grinned at Hiccup, who didn't get the joke. "General Orders. All branches. Everything not tied down is moving east." He chuckled wryly as he headed across the tent. "We're all Monster Hunters now."

"All vessels maintain current standoff distance," Admiral Midlew ordered. "Map this lizard's current course and bearing and start compiling a list of all possible solutions that will allow us to indirect before these...whatever they are...make landfall." His tone and expression were equally grim. "I need options."

"Sir," the Petty officer said. "Based on the current tracks, all our models have the targets converging on the US Pacific coast."

Mildew scowled. He turned away from the screens to consult Alvin.

"Doctor, are we certain this is the same animal from sixty years ago?"

Alvin suspected as much. "Remains were never found," he reminded the admiral.

"But if the MUTO is his prey," Heather began, calling Alvin's attention back to the printout of the wave pattern Stoick Haddock had detected, "this signal shows a call. Why call up a predator?"

"It didn't," Alvin said solemnly. "The predator was only listening. The MUTO was calling something else." His reasoning led him to another ominous hypothesis. "The pattern," he addressed Heather urgently. "Focus our search on Nevada."

The intensity of his tone cut through the chatter. Competing voices tapered off as all present gave Alvin their full attention.

"Nevada?" Captain Hampton asked. "What makes you think-?"

Heather got there first. "You don't think it could be...?"

"Fill me in here," Mildew said impatiently. "Why Nevada?"

"There was another spore," Heather informed him. "Intact. Found in the Philippine mine." She looked at Alvin, shaking her head in disbelief. "But we examined it, ran every test for years. You confirmed it for yourself. It was dormant."

"Maybe not anymore," Alvin said.

"The spore," Mildew asked urgently. "Where is it now?"

"It was highly radioactive," Heather said. "It was disposed of...by the Americans."

"Where?" Mildew repeated, even more forcefully.

"Where you put your nuclear waste," Alvin said flatly.

He called their attention back to the map table, where two converging dotted lines extended past the west coast of North America.

Nevada lay directly in their path.

The entire vault had been torn open from the inside. An enormous hole, at least three hundred feet in diameter. Yucca Mountain had been breached-from within. It was too late. A second MUTO had hatched.

And it was headed straight for Las Vegas.

End  
file.